

## The Events Connected With the Presence of the American Army in Western Bohemia in 1945<sup>1</sup>

PETRA KODETOVÁ

The fact that Pilsen and the area of Western Bohemia were liberated by the American troops instead of the Soviet army as the rest of the Protectorate Bohemia and Moravia was, affected substantially not only the following days and months after the liberation at the end of April and at the beginning of May 1945, but also the days after the end of the World War II, and moreover this event influenced the lives of the people living in Pilsen and its adjoining surrounding. However, the history of the liberation of Pilsen by the American army was presented in a distorted way during the Communist era and sometimes the fact of the American liberation was even refused, the presence of the American army in Pilsen region went down in the history of Western Bohemia and the events of the year 1945 survived in the memories of the local people and were revived again after the Velvet Revolution in 1989, when the fact of the American liberation was officially accepted and the historians paid attention to the events in Pilsen during the year 1945. These events are interesting also because of its exceptionality and it should be stated that the situation in Pilsen and its region was differed from the rest of the country by presence of the American army.

The operations that should have led to the liberation of the European countries by the American army started at the beginning of 1945 according to the plans of invasion of Germany. There were the troops of the American 3<sup>rd</sup> army under the command of General George S. Patton that had an essential importance for the Czech and Czechoslovak history. During the time, when the American 3<sup>rd</sup> army went around the mountain range of Harz in Germany in early April 1945,

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headed to the important German towns Jena, Hof, Regensburg and Passau. It is admitted that the border areas of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia remained out of its sphere of interest in the first months of 1945.<sup>2</sup> The situation changed at the end of April 1945, when the American commanders made an agreement with the leading Generals of the Soviet Red army that the American troops would also liberate the western part of the Protectorate Bohemia and Moravia and the line the American army should have not crossed was marked out by the towns Karlovy Vary, Pilsen and České Budějovice. According to the newspaper released in Pilsen in spring 1945: *“Pilsen, 19 April: Yesterday at 9:45 pm, it was announced from London that the Americans broke into our territory. At half past ten pm, the national Czechoslovak and American anthems were played. The troops of the 3<sup>rd</sup> American army, 90<sup>th</sup> Division crossed the border of the Czechoslovak Republic near the town Aš.”*<sup>3</sup> The American army soon crossed the border of the Protectorate Bohemia and Moravia and the troops of the 387<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, which was a part of the 97<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division of General Milton B. Halsey entered Františkovy Lázně on 25 April 1945 and Cheb soon after. The V Corps was ordered to occupy Pilsen and Karlovy Vary and other towns and villages situated nearby on the first days of May 1945. The American soldiers of the 97<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division entered Tachov on 2 May and Mariánské Lázně not long afterwards. The biggest town in Western Bohemia opened its gates to the American troops of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army on 6 May.<sup>4</sup>

According to a Czech journalist: *“The sky is cloudy, it poured with rain. Sometimes the clouds allowed the light to light up the streets. There are a lot of people in the pavements walking backward and forward. There is a joy in their faces, but there is also an uncertainty. The people of the town started a revolution almost without guns, without shooting, without shedding blood. Pilsen is free. [...] The American army should have come yesterday. We did not live to see it.*

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<sup>2</sup> J. HRBEK a kol., *Draze zaplacená svoboda. Osvobození Československa 1944–1945*, sv. II, Praha 2009, p. 238.

<sup>3</sup> *Nová svoboda*, May 6, 1945, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> HRBEK, p. 346.

*What now? The people are uncertain and impatient standing around the radios. And suddenly a call: Everybody to the streets, everybody to the squares! Be welcoming the American army! The squares and the streets are flooded by the people. There is a rattle from the street Říšská.<sup>5</sup> The crowd is roaring. The noise is getting louder and louder. Everybody is going there. In a minute a large tank with a white star came into the square. The Americans!”<sup>6</sup>* The presence of the American army in the region of Western Bohemia lasted only several months after the official liberation till November 1945, but it left some important traces of being there in the minds of the local people and also in the regional history.

### **The Activity of the American Soldiers in Pilsen and Its Region**

As mentioned above, the presence of the American troops in Pilsen and its surroundings influenced the lives of the people living in Pilsen and in the towns and villages in the Pilsen region. The one of the most important person who is undoubtedly connected with the liberation of Pilsen is General George S. Patton, the American Commander of the great influence, who participated on the campaign during the World War I as well and affected significantly the last battles of the World War II. He was connected mostly with the liberation of Pilsen in the Czech milieu. The troops, which came into Pilsen on 6 May 1945 did not remain in Pilsen and surroundings in the former composing. The newspaper *Práce* refers about the fact that of the V American Corps that was a part of the 3<sup>rd</sup> American Army was sent from Pilsen and was replaced by 22<sup>nd</sup> Corps under the command of General Harmon who had come from Rhineland. The author of the article continues: “[...] the 8<sup>th</sup> Armored and 94<sup>th</sup> Infantry Divisions came to the American occupation zone. General Harmon will visit Prague next days to meet president of the Czechoslovak Republic.”<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> The street is nowadays called Prešovská.

<sup>6</sup> *Lidová demokracie*, June 17, 1945.

<sup>7</sup> *Práce*, June 26, 1945, p. 2.

However the most important person of the American liberation of Pilsen remained General George S. Patton, who had visited Pilsen and its surroundings as well as the other towns and important places in the region of West Bohemia many times. One of the first visits of General Patton in Pilsen was the visit on 27 June 1945, when the General landed with his own plane on the airport in the part of Pilsen called Bory. During this day, General Patton visited the town and met the important people of the military and political life in Pilsen, and continued to Prague, where he was received by Czechoslovak president Edvard Beneš.<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless, more important staying of General Patton in Pilsen took place several months after this event, specifically on Friday 19 September 1945. It is important to say that this visit had primarily an official character. Moreover, the American Generals – Harmon and Colson, officially welcomed General Patton. *“After the greeting, General Patton was given a report from the assembled troop, listening to a popular Czech polka “Škoda lásky” and he did its observation.”*<sup>9</sup> After that the General went to Rokycany,<sup>10</sup> and then he returned back to Pilsen for the ceremonial dinner.

Except for General Patton it was also the American Ambassador in the Czechoslovak Republic Lawrence A. Steinhardt,<sup>11</sup> who visited Pilsen in 1945. His attendance in Pilsen was planned on the 4<sup>th</sup> August 1945 and the preparation for his reception had been made some weeks before his visit. The American ambassador visited the military headquarters of American General Harmon, who had met him outside Pilsen and accompanied him to the town. Lawrence A. Steinhardt arrived to the town hall exactly at twelve o’clock, where he was greeted enthusiastically by the American soldiers and the Czech civilians as well.

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<sup>8</sup> *Západočeská práce*, June 28, 1945, p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> *Mladá fronta*, September 19, 1945, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> *V nový život*, September 21, 1945, p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> Lawrence A. Steinhardt was the American Ambassador in the Czechoslovak Republic between the years 1945–1948.

Pilsen as the center of the American occupied zone in Bohemia was observed also by the British politicians and diplomats. Moreover, the British Consulate was established in June 1945 in Pilsen, when *“the British Consul Colonel Perkins landed in the Pilsen airport. After the landing he was welcomed by the American Army and the Commander Watkins. [...] The deputy of the Mayor of Pilsen expressed the pleasure of the fact, that it was Colonel Perkins, the great expert of Bohemia, who had become the British Consul in Pilsen. After the official welcoming Perkins with his entourage went to his residence ‘U Svépomoci’ number 11, where the other stuff of he British Consulate would come soon.”*<sup>12</sup>

Among the official visits in Pilsen it must be stressed also the presence of President of the Czechoslovak Republic, Edvard Beneš, whose first meeting with the American troops was planned on 9 June 1945. The Pilsen newspaper announced the arrival of the president on 6 June 1945: *“The headquarters of the V Corps of the American army represented by colonel Lord and major Parson informed the chairman of Regional National Committee Krejčík about the fact that the President of the Czechoslovak Republic would come to Pilsen on Saturday, 9 June 1945.”*<sup>13</sup> Edvard Beneš should have participated on the official greetings of the American army and met the Colonel and other commanders of both, Czechoslovak and American armies.<sup>14</sup>

In fact, the attendance of the Czechoslovak President in Pilsen took place on 15 June 1945 and it was the first time, when President Edvard Beneš visited Pilsen after the German occupation. The group of the Czechoslovak representatives including the President, Minister of National Defense Ludvík Svoboda, state secretary in Ministry of Defense General Mikuláš Ferjenčík, Minister Hubert Ripka, Chief of General Staff Bohumil Boček, Military Secretaries of the Presidential Office Oldřich Španiel and others. At 9:45 am the President with his escort crossed the American-Soviet demarcation line.

<sup>12</sup> *Svobodné slovo*, June 23, 1945, p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> *Svobodný směr*, June 6, 1945.

<sup>14</sup> *Nový den*, June 16, 1945, p. 1.

The first stop took place in Rokycany, where the American soldiers greeted the President and in his speech he did not forget to mention the legacy of the medieval personality, who had been born in Rokycany, John of Rokycany.<sup>15</sup> The next steps of the President led directly to Pilsen, where the mayor of the town greeted him. The American musicians played the official fanfares, which are played during the official events of greeting of the American President. *“Soon after the defile of the American army started, which lasted half an hour. The whole defile was observed by the spectators with the enthusiastic ovations [...]. After the ceremonial march eight American Generals and Colonels were decorated with the Order of the White Lion by the President of the Republic and other twenty-three American officers with Czechoslovak War Cross. This ceremony was accompanied by the long-lasting applause.”*<sup>16</sup> The visit of President Beneš in Pilsen finished before 5 pm and the President departed to Žinkovy, where in the area of the castle the President met British ambassador Nichols.

In this context, the important point to see is also the relationship between the American soldiers on the one side and the Czech officials and other civilian inhabitants on the other side. Among the available sources the most interesting is the report of General Harmon, which is quoted in the report of the British consulate in Pilsen:<sup>17</sup> *“On the subject of American-Czechoslovak relations, the General made three division. In the case of his Colonels and the higher Czech officials, relations were excellent. In the second category, containing the remainder of his officers, and Czech officials of a lower grade, relations were good, and in his third group, the non-commissioned ranks, and the minor Czech officials, he said relations were “fair to good”. He stated very emphatically he had had very little*

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<sup>15</sup> *Svobodný směr*, June 16, 1945, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>17</sup> The British consulate in Pilsen originated, according to the newspaper *Svobodný směr* on 22 July, when British consule Colonel Perkins came into Pilsen. *Svobodný směr*, June 23, 1945, p. 2.

*trouble with his own troops, and claimed that their conduct in the American zone was even better than their conduct while in the United States.*"<sup>18</sup>

The everyday life of the American soldiers and their cohabitation with the local people was described in many ways and the articles in numerous newspapers of this region. For instance there were two stories in *Svobodné slovo* about the relationship between the foreign soldiers and the Pilsen inhabitants that was good in spite of the fact that they did not understand each other. One of the stories described the American soldier, who took guard by the road everyday and checked the telephone. The old lady, who lived near there used to come and sit by him. *"She was not acquisitive. She did not want chocolate, cigarettes or chewing gum. She was sitting and speaking. Actually, she was speaking from morning till evening about her life, husband, daughter, etc. The American was sitting and listening, sometimes he added politely: 'Yes.' One day I spoke to the old lady: 'doesn't it bother you to speak and speak. And the soldier does not understand you.'* And she said: *'Whether he understands or not, he may catch something and the time flies faster.'*"<sup>19</sup> Even though the Pilsen inhabitants for the most part did not speak English, there were some efforts, how to enable the Czechs to understand the Americans. The Czechs could listen to the English courses for beginners in the Pilsen radio from Monday, May 28.<sup>20</sup>

Another interesting point of view of the presence of the American army in Western Bohemia is the fact that it was the first time, when the Czech people living in Pilsen and its surroundings met the African Americans. One man, who had offered an accommodation to the American Army, wrote an interesting article in a Pilsen newspapers, in which he described the behavior of the African American soldiers, who had been staying in his house: *"We, the adults, had to change our minds about the African Americans, because*

<sup>18</sup> Nichols to Foreign Office, 27. 10. 1945, The National Archives, London, Kew (henceforth only NA), FO 817/17.

<sup>19</sup> *Svobodné slovo*, July 4, 1945, p. 2.

<sup>20</sup> *Nový den*, May 27, 1945, p. 4.



*we recognized that they were not primitive, nor backward [as the German propaganda stated]. We found out that they were intelligent and well-educated. There is no difference between them and the White people, who had been civilized.*"<sup>21</sup>

Because the Americans stayed in the American occupied zone in Western Bohemia quite a long time, they brought their habits and customs to Central Europe, especially during the American national holiday. Among the others, it is interesting to mention the Independence Day (4 July) that was celebrated in Pilsen in 1945. Some days before, the newspaper announced that this important American holiday would be celebrated also in Western Bohemia and the preparations were in full swing.<sup>22</sup> The celebrations of the Independence Day began in the Municipal Theatre in Pilsen with the Czech opera "Bartered Bride" by Bedřich Smetana the eve before this great occurrence. On the 4 July, the celebrations started with the military parade, where the most important commanders of the American and the Czech armies took place.<sup>23</sup> After the parade, the celebrations continued in Bory, where the baseball match between the Americans and the Czechs was played and in the evening the people could visit the cinemas, dancing halls and pubs. "*The 4<sup>th</sup> of July 1945 was the remarkable date in a history of Pilsen, because it was the first time, when the Independence Day was celebrated here.*"<sup>24</sup> An interesting event happened during the celebration of the Independence Day. According to the newspaper *Práce* a five-year-old boy in a perfectly fitting American uniform, which had been definitely tailored especially for him, caught the Americans' attention, which were really enthusiastic about him and immediately took photos of him.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> *Svobodný směr*, June 6, 1945, p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> *Svobodný směr*, July 1, 1945, p. 2.

<sup>23</sup> *Práce*, July 4 1945, p. 2.

<sup>24</sup> *Svobodný směr*, July 5, 1945, p. 2.

<sup>25</sup> *Práce*, July 6, 1945, p. 5.



Another important public celebration took place on Saturday on August 18, when the Czechoslovak and American soldiers as well as the other people in Pilsen celebrated the end of World War II. After the military parade, General Harmon gave a speech to the people assembled on the main square in Pilsen: *"We will never allow another war to start. This war could be so destructive that it could destroy civilization on Earth. Our duty is to control the world policy and to nip any possible future conflict in the bud."*<sup>26</sup> His speech was read in Czech, English and Russian language. The whole celebration was finished with firing the salvos.<sup>27</sup>

Anyway, there was other important contributions of the American Army to the ordinary lives of the people in the Czechoslovak Republic. The special mission of the US Army under the command of Major Patrick Dolan, who was accompanied by doctor Josef Wechsberg, brought a new medication of penicillin to Prague. *"This medicine is not produced in Europe, so the gift to the Czechoslovak is really valuable,"*<sup>28</sup> the Pilsen newspapers wrote about the mission. Another contribution of the American Army to the Czech people, respectively to the inhabitants of Pilsen was the gift, which was handed over to the representatives of the town in June 1945. The Americans donated the television transmitter tower to Pilsen *"to reward the Pilsen people for lending the radio transmitter"*.<sup>29</sup> Pilsen became the first town in Europe, which had such a technical innovation.

The last but not least contribution of the American army to the Czechs was the establishing of a school for the Czech engineers, who should have learnt about the new technologies. The representatives of Pilsen provided the unfinished building of the road to the school.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> *Nový den*, August 19, 1945, p. 1.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>28</sup> *Svobodný směr*, July 4, 1945, p. 2.

<sup>29</sup> *Práce*, June 24, 1945, p. 2.

<sup>30</sup> *Západočeská práce*, August 3, 1945.

***“Democracy in the Czechoslovak Republic is Essential for the USA”***

The newspaper *Nový Den* printed the article named “*Democracy in the Czechoslovak Republic is Essential for the USA*” on the 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1945. The article describes the appointment between the President of the Czechoslovak Republic and American Ambassador Lawrence A. Steinhardt. According to the article the Ambassador stated: “*The government and the people of the United States contributed to the creation of the Czechoslovak Republic. The American Army that entered the area of the Czechoslovak Republic, had made the longest journey in the world history to help the freedom-loving people. The government and the people of the United States are really interested in the affluence and benefit of the Czechoslovak Republic. The restoration of democracy in the Czechoslovak Republic is the important prerequisite for the affluence, benefit and happiness its inhabitants. The Democracy in the Czechoslovak Republic is essential for American people.*”<sup>31</sup>

It is indisputable that the Western countries and the USA as well observed the political situation in the Czechoslovak Republic and focused their attention on the Pilsen region, where the American troops were operating. It is important to say that the political situation in Bohemia and Moravia revived after May 1945. The elections held in the towns of the Czechoslovak Republic during the summer 1945. There is a very important report written by the British Consul in Pilsen to his superior British Ambassador in Prague Nichols on 21<sup>st</sup> July 1945. “*The first elections to be held in the American occupied area of Czechoslovakia since the liberation of the country took place in PLZEN on Monday, July 16<sup>th</sup>, [...]. The method adopted was as follows. The names of ninety candidates were published in the local press several days previous to the election. Lists were also posted on public buildings. I am informed that the public were requested to submit protests against the inclusion of any name, but*

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<sup>31</sup> *Nový Den*, July 22, 1945, p. 3.

*that such protests should not be of a political nature but against a candidate's character, collaboration, etc. As a result of such protests five candidates were dropped.*"<sup>32</sup>

It is important to say that the political life in the restored Czechoslovak Republic was influenced by the presence of both American and Soviet armies. There is also an interesting fact connected with the American liberation of Pilsen. It is the news that was brought by one of the newspaper released in Pilsen. Among the news about the welcoming of the American soldiers by the inhabitants of Pilsen, there is one paragraph about the 'red flags'. *"The people in Pilsen are really enthusiastic about the liberation of Pilsen by the Americans, but they also do not forget that the biggest sacrifice have been made by the Soviet army leading by the famous Commander Marshal Stalin. There are the red flags waving in many windows to celebrate the soldiers of the Soviet army."*<sup>33</sup> As stated above, there was a demarcation line near Pilsen, where sometimes the soldiers of these both armies met. Officially, there were very good relationship between the Americans and Russians. According to newspaper *Pravda* from May 1945, the meeting of American General Robertson and the Soviet delegation took place in Pilsen and during the ceremonies the American General said that he hoped in the Soviet, American and Czechoslovak friendship. After finishing the official meeting *"both delegation went to the apartment of General Robertson, where they met mayor of Pilsen Mr. Ullrich and they spoke about the enthusiasm of the Czech and Slovak people. They came to a conclusion that this nation would overcome all of the difficulties of these hard times and would have a happy future. Mayor Ullrich also had a speech about the love of the Czechoslovak people to both armies."*<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> The results of the elections were similar to the other election results in the Czechoslovak Republic. Among the most powerful political parties were the Communist (40 %) and Social Democrats (30 %). The National Socialist gained 20 % and the Catholics 10 %. The Consul in Pilsen to the Ambassador in Prague 21. 7. 1945, NA, FO 817/17.

<sup>33</sup> *Nová svoboda*, May 6, 1945, p. 2.

<sup>34</sup> *Pravda*, May 13, 1945, p. 2.

But on the other hand, there were numerous conflicts between the American and Soviet soldiers in the Pilsen region. There was an incident, about which the British consul reported to the British Embassy in Prague in July 1945. *"I must warn you,"* wrote the consul, *"that the frontier controls are becoming much stricter. Both the Americans, and the Russians, have been rounding up people in their territory who are wandering around without the necessary authority. Also there was a slight fracas in the BUDWEIS are between American soldiers and some Russians connected with wine and women, which ended in one dead Russian Lieut."*<sup>35</sup>

### **The Škoda Works and the Western Allies**

As the most important and the biggest factory in the Pilsen region, the Škoda Works were observed by the Allies during the World War II and also by the Americans after the liberation of the Czechoslovak Republic in May 1945. It is important to mention that the Škoda Works were the target of the air raids also during the war itself. According to the record of the Foreign Office of Great Britain from November 1943, there were *"two major and five minor attacks with total of 519 sorties against Škoda Works at Pilsen. The result of these attacks have been disappointing and the damage caused to this important target negligible."*<sup>36</sup> But there were more air raids since the end of 1943 to the conclusion of the World War II. It is obvious that the Škoda Works with its strategic importance were visited by the important men of the American army and diplomacy. The most important visitor in the Škoda Works was Ambassador of the United States of America in Prague L. A. Steinhardt, who met the director of the Škoda Works on 4 August 1945. According to the Pilsner newspapers, he stated that *"the Škoda Works will start working two years earlier than Krupp Works in Essen"*.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> British Consulate to British Embassy in Prague, 26. 7. 1945, NA, FO 817/17.

<sup>36</sup> Bomber Command Operation Order No. 182 6. 12. 1943, NA, AIR 14/851.

<sup>37</sup> *Svobodný směr*, August 5, 1945, p. 2.

The important event connected with the Škoda Works happened in June 1945. According to the newspaper *Svobodné slovo*, the son of the American industrialist and founder of the Ford Motor Company Henry Ford, Henry Ford Jr. visited the Škoda Works. The author of the article stated that “*although the visit was very short, Henry Ford managed to observe the factories of Škoda Works and its branch factories in Doudlevce*”.<sup>38</sup> At the end of the article the author stated that Henry Ford had been satisfied with the observation. “*It is rumored,*” said the author at the end, “*that Henry Ford tends to establish a central repair Works for the Ford cars for the Central Europe*”.<sup>39</sup>

But they were the British, who paid the biggest attention to the Škoda Works. A group of the British diplomats and experts came to Pilsen in order to visit the Škoda Works in May 1945. The group spent all day in Škoda Works on Wednesday 23 May. “*General looked round the Works, including machine shops, large forging shop, foundries, and in afternoon spoke with Dr. Novy, head of the firm’s metallurgical department. He supplied information concerning the firm’s output before and during the war.*”<sup>40</sup>

Another important British visit in Škoda Works took place in June 1945, when a group of the representatives from Ministry of Supply and Ministry of Admiralty observed this important factory in the Czechoslovak Republic. Their conclusion was like this: “*Škoda make no ship armor. They have made some thin armor for tanks and similar vehicles, and have a number of armor casting for frontier fortifications. We obtained full particulars about this armor. [...] Although the Works were very badly damaged in the raid of April 24<sup>th</sup> 1945, there was still much of the plant to be seen.*”<sup>41</sup>

In conclusion, there is another interesting fact about the British visits in the Škoda Works. The workers and other employees in the Škoda works were

<sup>38</sup> *Svobodné slovo*, June 14, 1945.

<sup>39</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>40</sup> List of Movements in Connecting With Visit to Skoda Works, Pilsen, May/June 1945, NA, ADM 311/4.

<sup>41</sup> D. E. J. Offord to the Director of Naval Construction, Admiralty in Bath, 5. 6. 1945, NA, ADM 311/4.

friendly to the Americans as well as to the British delegations: “*We could not have had a better reception than that accorded us at Skoda Works. The firm spared no efforts in showing us all we wanted to see and telling us everything they could about the subjects in which we were interested.*”<sup>42</sup>

### **The Cultural Life of the American Army in Pilsen and Its Region of Western Bohemia**

The fact that the American army remained in the area of Western Bohemia officially till autumn 1945<sup>43</sup> influenced not only the lives of the inhabitants in Pilsen, but also the members of the American army themselves. The American soldiers lived in Pilsen region, released their own newspapers, organized with the participation of the Pilsners cultural events and spent their free time with variable cultural activities.

One of the most remarkable cultural activities was definitely the releasing the American newspapers in Pilsen region called ‘*The Attack*’, the newspapers of the 94<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and ‘*Chapel Chimes*’, and the newspapers of the 4<sup>th</sup> Armored Division with the subtitle ‘*Somewhere in Czechoslovakia*’.

*The Attack* was released during the summer months, June and July 1945 and it was published in a town Sušice in southwest Bohemia. It described not only the lives of the American soldiers in West Bohemia, but also the international news specifically the movements of the American army in Asia and the advancement of the international peace negotiations. One of the first articles was intended for the Czech inhabitants and it said: “*Hello, my Czech Friend: I am a soldier in the 94<sup>th</sup> Division of the U.S. Army. We have recently come into this area of your beautiful country in place of the American troops who were here before us. [...] I can’t speak your language yet but I want to*

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<sup>42</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>43</sup> The official farewell ceremony was on 20 November 1945, but the last American soldiers left Pilsen two years later, in 1947. See more: Z. ROUČKA, ...*a přinesli nám svobodu*, Pilsen 2005, non-paginated.

*learn it as fast as I can. I am taking this opportunity through our division newspaper to let you know we like you and your kind people. We want to be your friends.*"<sup>44</sup>

On the other hand the *Chapel Chimes* did not publish the news or the columns about the life of the Americans in Czechoslovakia, but there were mostly the stories, poems and reflections. According to the first edition, we can observe that the newspaper had a Christian orientation: "*Praise the Lord, 'The War here has ended.' This issue of Chapel Chimes is DEDICATED to Our HONORED DEAD, who fell in battle... They have crossed the 'Last Ferry West' God gave them a quick passage home. We are thankful for every Remembrance of Them. 'TAPS' The end of a soldier's day.*"<sup>45</sup> Besides the newspaper, there were some magazines written by the American soldiers, for instance '*Cue em*' or '*Buffalo Chips*', both published in printing work '*Grafika*' in Pilsen. "*These magazines serve as the source of information about the Czechs to the American Army and make the Americans familiar with our way of life, specifically cultural and economic life.*"<sup>46</sup>

But the cultural life of the American Army in Western Bohemia was not limited only to the newspapers or magazines. There were many cultural events during spring and summer 1945 in Pilsen and other towns in its surroundings. When the World War II ended, the cultural life in the Czech towns was revived again and above all, there were the theaters that were opened again. The most important theatre in Pilsen was the City Theatre, where a lot of the performance not only for the Czech, but also for the American soldiers took place. The newspaper *Západočeské Svobodné slovo* announced in June 1945 that the Americans really liked the opera *Bartered Bride* by Bedřich Smetana "*and the directorship of the theatre incorporated two more performances of this opera into the program this week, exclusively for the American army*".<sup>47</sup>

<sup>44</sup> *The Attack*, June 24, 1945, p. 5.

<sup>45</sup> *Chapel Chimes*, May 13, 1945, p. 1.

<sup>46</sup> *Nový den*, July 14, 1945, p. 2.

<sup>47</sup> *Západočeské Svobodné slovo*, June 15, 1945.



## Petra Kodetová

### The Events Connected With the Presence of the American Army in Western Bohemia in 1945

Among the cultural events taken place in Pilsen in 1945 we can name also the event called 'Pilsen Musical Summer' during which a whole range of the American artists from the American army appeared. The most important personality, who performed in Pilsen during this cultural event, was conductor Walter Ducloux, the assistant of the well-known conductor Toscanini, who conducted the orchestra of Pilsen theatre and philharmonic orchestra during the concert on Friday July 20, 1945.<sup>48</sup> "*Walter Ducloux did not make easy his conducting, because he chose the Czech composition (for instance Carnival by Dvořák, At Twilight by Zdeněk Fibich, Vltava by Bedřich Smetana, From the New World by Dvořák)... he proved his conductor's qualities in these pieces.*"<sup>49</sup>

### The Departure of the American Army from Pilsen

The presence of the American soldiers in Pilsen and its surroundings lasted only few months. The official farewells to the Americans were held in November 1945 with the participation of the representatives of Pilsen. According to newspaper *Práce*, which announced the decision of the American Ministry of Affairs that the American Army should have left Czechoslovak till December 1, 1945.<sup>50</sup> The official farewell ceremony when the officials' farewell ceremony took place in the biggest square in Pilsen. Among the famous personalities, who participated this ceremony, were for instance the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czechoslovak Republic Jan Masaryk, the son of the first president of the First Czechoslovak Republic Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, and Minister of Defense Ludvík Svoboda. There was also Petr Zenkl on behalf of Prague.<sup>51</sup> It was not only Pilsen that prepared the official farewell ceremony to the American Army. The events, as the one in Pilsen was, took place in

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<sup>48</sup> *Práce*, July 20, 1945, p. 3.

<sup>49</sup> *Práce*, July 31, 1945, p. 3.

<sup>50</sup> *Nový den*, November 11, 1945, p. 1.

<sup>51</sup> *Nový den*, November 21, 1945, p. 1.

many towns in the West Bohemian region. It can be mention for example town Klatovy<sup>52</sup>, Sušice<sup>53</sup>, Domažlice<sup>54</sup> or Cheb.<sup>55</sup>

The short but important presence of the U.S. Army in Western Bohemia thus ended. Its impact on the development of the region was quite important. The Americans not only liberated the area of Western Bohemia, but also considerably helped to its revitalization after the war. Thanks to their presence in the region, the communications, and other important facilities were repaired and Pilsen was able to enter a new era of its history. One of the most important factors of the American presence in Pilsen was the overall good relationship between the U.S. soldiers and the civil population. However the memory of this would not last long, because only three years after these events the communist government initiated a policy of erasing the memory of the presence of the Americans in Pilsen. This complicated process however doesn't belong to the scope of this article.

### **Abstract**

The fact that Pilsen was liberated by the American army affected the lives of the inhabitants of the West Bohemia considerably. The relations of the Czechoslovak civilian population with the U.S. soldiers were generally good. Both nationalities organized various cultural events and participated on the restoration of the war-damaged city. This progress is depicted on the pages of contemporary Czechoslovak and American press, which informed about the important events of the stay of the American army in Pilsen. The other topics of the article are especially the question of the Škoda Works, which was visited several times by the Allied authorities, and the stance of American military leadership toward Pilsen and Czechoslovakia.

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<sup>52</sup> *Nový den*, November 25, 1945, p. 2.

<sup>53</sup> *Nový den*, January 29, 1945, p. 2.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>55</sup> *Nový den*, November 28, 1945, p. 2.

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